

## THE ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN CHARACTER'S SPEAKING STRATEGIES IN STRUGGLING AGAINST ALZHEIMER.

By:

<sup>1</sup>Heru Susanto, <sup>2</sup>Dwijani Ratnadewi

University of Muhammadiyah Surabaya

Email: <sup>1</sup>[heru\\_spf91@yahoo.com](mailto:heru_spf91@yahoo.com), <sup>2</sup>[yani\\_rd@yahoo.com](mailto:yani_rd@yahoo.com)

### ABSTRACT

This research aimed to analyze utterances used by the main character in the film 'Still Alice' (2014), Alice, in her effort to struggle against Alzheimer. It described and explained the utterances in relation to her profession as a Linguistic Professor and her Alzheimer. The data were taken from both the film and also its script. There were three objectives of the research, that were types of positive politeness strategy used by Alice for struggling against Alzheimer, the explanation about the way Alice used these types in her utterances and the reasons of using these types of her utterances. Descriptive qualitative was applied as a research method, while Positive Politeness Strategy and Discourse in Film as the main approach to find out the objective of the research. The result was that there were three positive politeness : promise strategy, be optimistic strategy and giving understanding as strategies employed by Alice in her utterances that have been used to fight against her illness, Alzheimer.

Keywords: Politeness, Positive Politeness Strategy, Struggling, Alzheimer.

### INTRODUCTION

As a human, doing communication is the most important thing. It is needed by everyone in his/her life. People can keep their relationship with other by keeping their good communication. They can also share their experience, idea, and thought through communication. In doing communication, people need to think several important things when delivering their utterances such as with whom we are talking, in what context we are having conversation, the tone when uttering the words, and so on as they can be used as the indicators for the interlocutor to assess or judge our attitude and behaviour especially in the term of politeness. Politeness can be defined as an expression of the speakers' intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward another (Mills, 2003:6). On the other hand, according to Lakoff (1990:34) that is stated by Eelen in his book entitled *A Critique of Politeness Theories*, politeness as a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange (2001:2). It means that politeness is used by speaker to decrease or minimize the face threats and also to avoid conflict that often occurs in doing communication.

Actually, a study of politeness has been discussed for many years and it gains a great deals of interest from many researchers. Haugh (2007) as stated by Izadi in his journal entitled *Politeness in Spoken Review Genre: Viva Voce Context*, politeness research has been in the core of attention for three decades, producing a great deal of literature in Pragmatics,

Social Psychology and Sociolinguistics (2011). It means that there are many other literatures which are created by applying politeness theory. Commonly, politeness is known as how polite we are but it means wider as it is called as a strategy of communication. Brown and Levinson (1987:68-69) states that there are four types of politeness strategy, that are on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record strategy. In this research, all these types were not analyzed one by one but it only focused on positive politeness strategy used by Alice for struggling against Alzheimer in "Still Alice" film.

The uniqueness of this film is the main character, Alice, in this film works as a Linguistic Professor suffering from Alzheimer. A professor is known as a successful person who has a good memory of any knowledge he has but it was not found on Alice anymore, since she was caught by the illness. Although she has Alzheimer but she has a high spirit for struggling against it. These two points which boost and motivate the researcher to conduct this research. In addition, Alice character is a good figure for other people. She does not only motivate herself for facing and struggling against her Alzheimer, but she also motivates other people to keep their spirit in any condition. Overall this film serves many valuable things. One of them is illustrated through Alice character. She always shows that she is not a weak-minded woman. Alzheimer that is being faced does not make herself desperate, although it is a serious health problem but she believes that she herself is able to fight against it. This belief is seen from her efforts and also her utterances.

## **FILM AS DISCOURSE**

Film becomes a creative product that is continuously produced. Film is a product that imitates but deeper than the real world, because it is the result of the products created. Appreciation towards film increases along with the abundance of film production, as discourse analysis on films which utilizes words and pictures in the films as devices is learned more to understand the content. Gee stated how meaning can be built through words and pictures. Semiotic source whatsoever (words or other kinds of signs) have the meanings based on the context-related (2014: 214). In other words, all interaction; words and pictures can describe the meaning together. McCarthy (1991:15) states that discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used and strengthened by Yule (1996:83) that discourse analysis focuses on spoken or written text of the process in which language is used elaborately in some contexts to convey particular intention. While, Paltridge (2006:1) argues that discourse analysis is an approach to the analysis of language that looks at pattern of language across text as well as the social and cultural contexts in which the texts occur. Instead, Brown and Yule (1983:1) propose that the analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use. Films are the representation of everyday life, the analysis concerns with how words' and pictures' role in constructing meaning under certain context. Discourse analysis is a method to analyze language, including that in films that are related to the social and cultural contexts by examining the pattern of language and how it is used to deliver a certain goal.

Meaning from words and pictures or any signs in films construct meaning based on its context. Context in discourse and pragmatics is a vital thing as it contributes an idea or thought for the hearer or reader for analyzing and interpreting the real meaning of the speaker, writer or characters in the films. According to Cutting (2002:3) in Paltridge in his

book *Discourse Analysis: An Introduction* (2006:54) there are a number of key aspects of context that are crucial to the production and interpretation of discourse. They are divided into situational, background knowledge, and co-textual context. Situational context is in terms of what people 'know about what they can see around them', background knowledge context is in terms of what people 'know about each other and the world' and co-textual context is in terms of what people 'know about what they have been saying'. Dealing with background knowledge context, there are two aspects included as background knowledge. They are cultural knowledge and interpersonal knowledge. It includes what people know about world, each other, current rules or norms in the particular place where the communication occurs.

### **POLITENESS AS THE CHARACTER'S STRATEGY**

When people communicate with other people, there is an occurrence that is inevitable and is almost undergone by everyone in their utterances. When this occurrence is related to politeness, it is called Face Threatening Acts (FTA) some acts 'threaten' a person's face (Paltridge 2006:77). It means that there are several acts that occur during communication and they cause the interlocutor feels threatened. In addition, it is not only threaten the hearer's face but it may also threaten the speaker's face (Brown and Levinson, 1987:67). Politeness is thus a strategy people use to save both interlocutors' faces while attempting to distribute their intention. Alice uses these strategies when she has a talk with other characters in the film, expressing her belief, desire, wish and hope behind her sadness of having the unwanted illness Alzheimer. Some strategies that are worth mentioning are the Promise, Optimistic and Giving understanding to the hearer. These strategies which are used to redress the potential threat of some FTAs inform that the speaker may choose to stress his cooperation with the hearer in the form of promising, showing the optimistic of the interlocutors' cooperation in some ways and satisfying the hearers' positive wants by giving understanding to any respecting matters (Ibid, 125-129).

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

The source of data in this research is the film entitled "Still Alice" produced in 2014 and its script was written by Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland. The film was compiled in the form of Digital Versatile Disc (DVD) and its script was retrieved from [http://www.sonyclassics.com/awards-information/stillalice\\_screenplay.pdf](http://www.sonyclassics.com/awards-information/stillalice_screenplay.pdf), which was accessed in March 25, 2015. The script was selected into related topic part and the rest was reduced. These selected utterances were framed based on related topics. These data were then in the form of utterances in Positive Politeness Strategies used by the main character, Alice, illustrating her struggling against her illness, Alzheimer which leads to memory loss and changes in thinking. Discourse in Film Analysis and Politeness Theory were applied to find how meaning was constructed. The data were also categorized based on the Politeness Strategy and explained their way of using these strategies to construct the meaning Alice intended.

### **ANALYSIS AND FINDING**

In her effort to keep living in normal life with the family and colleagues, Alice has to work hard fighting against her illness. Being a linguistic professor this condition really disturbs her. Her effort to survive from this condition was analyzed through kinds of strategies she used, the following are the strategies found.

### a. Promise Strategy

Alice had a conversation with Erick Wellman that took place at a Head of Department's Office of Columbia University where she worked as a Linguistic Professors. Erick Wellman as a head of department conveyed about his disappointment toward Alice's performance in teaching her students recently as stated in the dialogue "...but I was thoroughly disappointed" (Glatzer and Westmoreland, 2014:34). He knew Alice's performance exactly as he followed the on-line version of Alice's course and he thought that her course was little focus, very erratic, and she got loss in them (*Ibid*, 34-35). Responding to Erick's disappointment, Alice apologized to Erick by saying "I am so sorry" because she did not know that her students felt this way. In reverse, she stated "Obviously I will make the necessary adjustments and we can reevaluate my performance next semester." In this utterance, it is started with the word "Obviously". It is an adverb that is used to emphasize phrase "make the necessary adjustments". The Interpersonal theme "obviously" as the point of view of the content of the clause (Paltridge 2006, 145-146) may indicate the point of view of the speaker or the writer toward the clause which is being taken and it expresses the obviousness of her utterance. She also used modal verb "will" which explain her particular action that is planned, that is "make the necessary adjustments". As stated in the beginning that Erick felt disappointed with Alice's performance as her course was very muddled, it seems that the necessary adjustments here is to improve her performance in teaching or giving lecture.

Further, she said "reevaluate" which may emphasize that she is willing to cooperate and manage her teaching better instead of the hard remark given by the students. She also used "we" as a pronoun and "can" as a modal verb. By using "we", Alice may involve Erick, her students and of course herself to conduct reevaluation of her performance in teaching. The pronoun "we" indicates that Alice as if asking them to pay attention closely toward her way in giving lecture. While, "can" as a modal verb is used to express her ability, particularly dealing with her performance in delivering the course. It seems that Alice is ready to make an adjustment with her performance next semester. On the other hand, the conjunction "and" may illustrate the additional information toward her conviction. As if she does not afraid to be reevaluated and it may also show that she herself is really able to improve her way in teaching.

Then, Alice's explanation was responded by Erick through his word "*Listen*". It may indicate that Erick wants to get more information about the problem that is being faced by Alice. He seems curious about the cause of this problem. Erick, then continued his utterance by saying "*is everything okay at home?*". This question may indicate his way to dig up and acquire the relevant information, reinforced with his next question "*Is everything all right between you and John?*". In this second utterance, apparently he emphasizes the clarification of his first question, it can be seen from the word "okay" as a synonym of "all right" and also the word "home" as an cataphoric reference of "you and John". In addition, these two questions may illustrate that Erick pays attention to Alice as Erick takes notice of aspects of Alice's condition.

Based on the analysis above, the meaning of Alice's utterance contains a promise. It can be seen from her utterance "*Obviously, I will make the necessary adjustments*". The strategy that is used by Alice in this utterance is suitable with strategy proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987:125), that is promise strategy. It is one of positive politeness strategies that is used by Alice to express her good intention in satisfying Erick's positive face wants as she knows that she has made Erick felt disappointed so she tries to redress her fault by promising which deals with the necessary adjustments.

Thus, it can be inferred that the strategy that is used by Alice in this utterance is promise strategy. While, the analysis of Alice's reasons in using this strategy is based on the words

which are used by her and then they are related to her background as a Linguistic Professor and also her Alzheimer that attacks herself recently. After stating a promise *“Obviously, I will make the necessary adjustments”*, she continued by uttering *“we can reevaluate my performance next semester”*. By understanding the meaning of this utterance, it seems that Alice shows her confidence and readiness to be reevaluated. Modal verb “can” indicates Alice that she feels confident and ready to give the best of her although she has Alzheimer. On the other hand, through her words above, it seems that Alice tries to keep the good image of her title as a Linguistic Professor. It is strengthened by the pronoun “we” that is used by her. It seems that she asks Erick directly to reevaluate her performance together, she does not mind if Erick also join to her class while she gives a lecture. This way, he can observe, assess, and evaluate her performance directly and it is better than following the course through the on-line version. Drawing an inference from the analysis above, it seems that all Alice’s efforts are conducted for struggling against her Alzheimer.

## **b. Optimistic Strategy**

Having a serious conversation, Alice and Erick Wellman referred the Alzheimer which attacked her. It took place at a Head of Department’s Office of Columbia University where she worked as a Linguistic Professor. At this point, Erick delivered his care and did not want Alice gets suppressed with this condition. In conveying his desire, Erick used the pronoun “we” in ‘We don’t want you under any undue stress’ it means that not only himself who feels worried with Alice’s condition but other people also feel the same with him. “We” may refer to the department and faculty as stated by Erick in the next dialogue, *“I’ll have to let the department and faculty know”* (Glatzer and Westmoreland. 2014:36). Erick thought that this condition will cause Alice be counterproductive. In addition, in conveying his care, he used a positive politeness strategy that was portrayed through his words *“Really there’s no need to... We don’t want you under any undue stress”*. This utterance seems to show that Erick notices and understands Alice’s condition well. And then, Alice replied it by saying *“I can handle the stress”*. This utterance is built with the subject “I” as topical theme which relates to what the utterances has to say about (Paltridge, 2006:145). It means that she wants to assert something about herself and perhaps what would be stated is the main point that should be concerned by the hearer. While the rheme *“can handle the stress”* with “can” in it expresses her ability to control the stress. Apparently Alice utters this statement purposely to ensure Erick that herself is still able to endure the stress that is being faced.

Further, she said *“I would like to remain in the department...”*. In this utterance, she also used “I” as a topical theme and it is followed by phrase “would like”, it means that she emphasizes that she herself really wants to keep her stay in the department although she has Alzheimer that will limit her abilities. It is then confirmed by her utterance *“...for as long as we all think it’s possible”*. In here, “as long as” as the positive comparison is used by Alice to determine how long she must remain in the department. In addition, she also used the pronoun “we” and followed by the word “all”. It means that in determining how long she must remain or leave the department involves other people, especially those in the department and faculty. While, the word “all” is used to strengthen the pronoun “we”. This utterance seems to show that Alice wants to prove that herself is still proper and needed in the department as a lecturer although instead of her deficiency caused by Alzheimer.

Based on the analysis above, when it is related to politeness strategy, especially positive politeness strategy, the meaning of Alice’s utterance contains an optimism. It can be seen from her utterance *“I can handle the stress”*. The strategy that is used by Alice in this utterance is

suitable with the strategy proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987:126), that is optimistic strategy. This strategy is used by Alice to present her optimism to Erick that what she thought is really right and it can be proved through her ability in controlling the stress.

Thus, it can be drawn that the strategy that is used by Alice in this utterances is optimistic strategy. While, the analysis of Alice's reasons in using this strategy is based on the words which are used by her and then they are related to her background as a Linguistic Professor and also her Alzheimer which attacks herself recently. In the first utterance, she said *"I can handle the stress"*. By understanding this utterance, apparently it shows that she has a high optimism for controlling her stress that is caused by her Alzheimer. Besides, this utterance may also show that Alice does not want to be recognized as a weak-minded woman. Further, she said *"I would like to remain in the department as long as we all think it's possible"*. This utterance indicates that Alice has a high desire to keep working at the Columbia University and as if she shows to Erick that herself is still able to work and teach her students professionally instead of her growing dementia. Drawing an inference from the analysis above, it seems that all Alice's efforts are conducted for struggling against her Alzheimer.

### c. Understanding the Hearer

At dining area of Lido Beach House Alice and her son, Tom was having a conversation. There were also other Alice's children and their spouses, John, Anna, Charlie and Lydia. They all gathered at dinning room to have a breakfast. While they were having breakfast, they talked about many things, including Sushi and Hot dogs which were served on the table, Anna's pregnancy, was also one interesting topic then. The fact that her mother suffered from Alzheimer became Tom's concern as he asked her *"So Mom, how are you feeling?"*. Actually, what was stated by Tom indicates that he himself notices his mother's condition as he is worried with her mother's health. In the field of politeness, this strategy is one of realization of positive politeness strategies in language. His question was shortly answered by Alice through her words *"Mostly fine"*. The word "mostly" indicates that almost her whole day is in a good condition, in which there is no a serious problem befalls herself. In need of confirmation, Tom continued asking *"Really?"*. His short response may illustrate that he needs confirmation of what was stated by his mother, which was reinforced through Alice's statement, *"Yeah. I use this thing"* confirming what has stated previously. The statement *"I use this thing"* which is built with "I" as a topical theme which illustrates that Alice wants to emphasize herself through her utterance. In other words, she wants to make the hearer more focus toward herself as it is the main point. "I use this thing" is then another confirmation referring to her good condition by mentioning the handphone which helps her followed by another utterance *"It reminds me to take my medications and things like that"*. "It" as anaphoric reference refers to her cellphone. In this utterance she used additive conjunction "and" which may illustrate the additional information dealing with the function of her cellphone. She mentioned that it can remind herself to take medications and things like that. Phrase "things like that" indicates that there are more than one thing that can be done by her cellphone as the word "things" is in the plural form. It refers to give question about the name of her oldest daughter, the question about the address where she lives with her family, and also the question about the month of her birthday as showed in the previous scene (Glatzer and Westmoreland, 2014:41-43).

Based on the analysis above, when Alice's utterances are related to politeness strategy, particularly on positive politeness strategy, the meaning of her utterances have tendency that she tries to give understanding to Tom. It can be viewed from her utterance *"Yeah. I use this thing. You know, instead of a memory. It reminds me to take my medications and things like that."* The strategy that is used by Alice in this utterance is suitable with the strategy proposed by Brown

and Levinson (1987:129). It deals with giving understanding to the hearer. This strategy that is used by Alice might satisfy the hearer's positive face. On the other hand, this utterance illustrates her effort by utilizing the function of cellphone as a way to struggle against her Alzheimer. It can be inferred as Alice can not memorize anything for a long time, it is illustrated clearly in the previous scene while she was consulting with the Neurologist, Dr. Benjamin. In this case, she could not memorize the word that was given by Dr. Benjamin (Glatzer and Westmoreland, 2014:17). Therefore, she uses her cellphone to help her conduct what she should do as she does not want that her Alzheimer holds a rein on herself. What is conducted by Alice is an innovative way to cover her demerit and she makes every endeavor to conquer her Alzheimer.

Based on all the data analysis above, it can be seen about how Alice struggles for facing and surviving on Alzheimer which attacks herself. All her efforts are clearly seen from her utterances and by understanding the meaning of her utterances through positive politeness strategy approach, they indicate that she attempts hard to struggle against her Alzheimer. As also stated by Alice : *I can handle the stress. I would like to remain in the department for as long as we all think it's possible.*

From her utterance above, it portrays Alice's conviction that she herself is able to control the Alzheimer that is being faced. She feels sure that she is still completely able to give the best for the students, so she wants to keep staying in the department as professional lecturer. Alice is a hard worker woman who wants to get everything and all at once, although there are many difficulties which should be faced, but she always tries and efforts with all her abilities and intelligence to obtain all the wishes. This characteristics still exist although she suffers from Alzheimer. A person with Alzheimer usually loss of motivation (Sander Brown Center on Aging, 2006:11), but it is not found on Alice. Knowing that herself has Alzheimer, she motivates herself continuously that her Alzheimer can be conquered which also seen from her utterance above.

Further, she does not want that her Alzheimer affects and limits her abilities and she also wants to prove that she is "still Alice" like she used to be, who has outstanding intelligence and brightness, as seen from her utterance " .... *Obviously I will make the necessary adjustments and we can reevaluate my performance next semester*". This utterance illustrates that she tries to ensure and also emphasize that she herself is "still Alice" who is able to give the course professionally for all the students although she has Alzheimer. It means that she feels sure that her Alzheimer will not affect and impede her way in giving lecture. This utterance also illustrates that she keeps the good image of her title as a Linguistic Professor because a professor is known as a person who has many bright ideas to discover the new way for solving the complicated case. However, she wants to prove that she can find a new way for defending herself on her Alzheimer as shown in her utterance "*Yeah. I use this thing. You know, instead of a memory. It reminds me to take my medications and things like that*"

By understanding the meaning of her utterance above, it can be inferred that she realizes that herself is easy to forget something so she uses her cellphone to remind taking the medications and others. In other words, it can be stated that if she does not use her cellphone, she will forget easily to conduct something that should be done. She does not want that her Alzheimer hold a rein on herself so she uses a way that can be applied easily to overcome it. Generally, a person who suffers from Alzheimer does not manage the self care (Sander Brown Center on Aging, 2006:11), but it does not prevail for Alice. She always manages the self care,

not only physically but it is more emphasized on the way to diminish the degree of forgetfulness which illustrated through the way he uses the cellphone to remind herself conduct her daily activities. It is a real proof that she is really struggling against her Alzheimer.

## CONCLUSION

The process of determining the possible intention or purpose of Alice's utterances is decipherable by applying politeness theory, particularly positive politeness strategy proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) as the main approach. The way she performs her efforts or struggle are mostly stated by using optimistic strategy which aims to ensure her interlocutor that she is "still Alice" who has outstanding intelligence and brightness and considered as a high flying academic carrer woman. It is shown through the modal verb "can" which expresses her abilities to conduct her activities and the tobe "am/is" that illustrates her conviction in delivering statements. It means that she builds and performs the optimism to maintain everything which has been accumulated by herself. Promise and giving understanding strategy are also used to portray the way she faces and survives on her Alzheimer. In promise strategy, it is shown through the modal verb "will" which indicates that she has a high intention to do something. While, in giving understanding strategy, it can be seen from innovative ways applied by herself. Although she has a disease which usually gets worse over time, but she tries hard with kinds of way to conquer it. Based on the previous description, there are some significances about positive politeness strategy in language. It is not only a strategy that is used to utter or assert a statement but it is also able to reveal the hidden meaning of the speaker. Therefore, by using positive politeness strategy, people can detect what actually desired by the speaker. In this research, this strategy is used by Alice because she wants to show that she tries hard for struggling against her Alzheimer. It is conducted by Alice as she does not want that the Alzheimer hold a rein on herself which can limit her abilities, break her carrer, and also affect the harmony of her family.

## References :

- A, Izadi. 2013. *Politeness in Spoken Review Genre: Viva Voce Context*. *Pertanika J.Soc. & Hum.* 21 (4): 1411 – 1429.
- Brown, Gillian and George Yule. 1983. *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, and Sydney: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson. 1987. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eelen, Gino. 2001. *A Critique of Politeness Theories*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Gee, James Paul. 1999. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. London and New York: Routledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2014. "An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method (4th ed.)". New York, USA: Routledge, Taylor, and Francis Group.
- Glatzer, Richard and Wash Westmoreland. 2014. *Still Alice*. Retrieved from [http://www.sonyclassics.com/awards information/stillalice\\_screenplay.pdf](http://www.sonyclassics.com/awards information/stillalice_screenplay.pdf). (accessed on March 25, 2015).
- \_\_\_\_\_(director). 2014. *Still Alice*. United States: Sony Pictures Classics. 101 minutes.
- McCarthy, Michael. 1991. *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers*. UK, USA, Australia, Spain, South Africa: Cambridge University Press.



- Mills, Sara. 2003. *Gender and Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Paltridge, Brian. 2006. *Discourse Analysis: An Introduction*. London: Continuum.
- Sander Brown Center on Aging. 2006. *The Book of Alzheimer's: for African-American Churches*. University of Kentucky.
- Yule, George. 1996. *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.